



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, July 11 – July 24, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Staff from the Yellowstone Wolf Project are continuing to monitor a radio collared male wolf that dispersed from the 8-Mile pack in the Paradise Valley into Yellowstone National Park. The wolf (SW147M) was originally collared in 2006. It is traveling with 2 female wolves inside the Park.

Boyd and Bahnson have been conducting fieldwork around the Murphy Lake and Lydia pack areas. Laudon and Bahnson will be working in the Great Bear pack area 7/20-7/29. Edgely will join Boyd on a trapline in the Lydia pack area.

Bradley, Ross, Lance, and Asher have all been in the field as well.

Flights: Laudon flew in NWMT on 7/15. Lance flew the Rocky Mountain Front on 7/16. Ross flew on 7/21. FWP is beginning to get better visuals on packs and observing pups.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

On 7/11, WS investigated a dead calf on public land near Morgan Creek (west side of Madison Valley) and determined it to be a probable wolf kill. FWP and WS have increased monitoring efforts in the area and talked with the producer about the state law and regulations pertaining to wolf-livestock conflicts.

On 7/12, WS confirmed a calf was killed on public land by a wolf or wolves near Short Creek in the upper Ruby River area (upper west side of the Gravelly Range). FWP and WS increased monitoring efforts to determine if this area is used by other wolf packs or if there is a new pair in the area. WS was asked to set traps to place a collar if it appears to be a new pair/pack. FWP flew on 7/21 and

found the Jack Creek pack in the same area and authorized removal of 1 wolf. The control work was completed when an adult female was killed on 7/22.

On 7/13, WS confirmed that wolves killed a calf on public land east of Wisdom. The McVey pack continues to be involved with cattle depredations in the West Pioneers (Big Hole Valley). A wolf was collared on June 30 and up to 4-5 wolves have been seen. Two wolves were killed by WS as authorized by FWP (one on July 8 and the other on July 10). Livestock had been moved to a different pasture on or about July 11. Losses were confirmed in recent weeks and many confirmed depredations of adult-sized cattle also occurred in 2008. FWP has authorized WS to lethally remove the collared wolf and remaining pack members. On 7/16, three wolves were killed. Efforts to remove the remaining wolves (thought to be 6) are ongoing.

On 7/13, WS confirmed that a ewe was killed by a wolf or wolves on private land in a pasture around the house and corrals in Jeffers. On July 14 WS confirmed that a lamb was killed by a wolf or wolves in the night pen next to the house. No radio collars were heard during the investigation and it is unknown at this point what individual or pack may have been involved, though Cedar Creek is suspected. The collar in that group does not appear to be working, thus the interest in getting another collar out. WS was authorized to kill one wolf and to collar one wolf. A permit was issued to the landowner. FWP had also talked with the sheep owner and neighbors and described state law and regulations pertaining to wolf-livestock conflicts and human safety. WS killed one wolf on 7/21 and the permit was cancelled. Efforts to place a collar in the group are ongoing.

Late in the week of 7/13, WS investigated some dead sheep in the Ruby River drainage and they had been killed by coyotes and were unconfirmed as wolf depredation.

On 7/13, WS confirmed a ram killed by a wolf or wolves on private land near Grant. No radio collars were heard in the area and the individual or pack involved with the depredations is unknown. WS has traps out and is still working on the previous management action. Three separate incidents were confirmed during the first week of June in which 5 sheep were confirmed killed, 2 sheep were confirmed injured and 1 sheep was probable dead. WS is still attempting to remove one wolf and collar 1 wolf.

On 7/16, IDFG called FWP (Ross) and reported that the Sage Creek pack (a MT-ID border pack that is counted in the MT population) had killed another sheep on the Experimental Sheep Station near Humphrey ID. FWP agreed to the IDFG request for lethal control and granted permission for IDWS to work within MT and to coordinate their work with MT WS. One adult male was killed on 7/23.

As of 7/17, no further reports of injured or dead livestock were confirmed near Jackson in the Big Hole Valley and lethal control efforts concluded after 45 days had passed since the last confirmed loss. Kill permits were cancelled.

On 7/22, WS confirmed that a 300 lb calf had been killed by wolves on private land west of Dupuyer. The Bennie pack in the immediate area. When the calf was discovered two black wolves and a radio collared gray wolf were seen feeding on the calf carcass. A grizzly bear has also taken over the carcass. WS was authorized to lethally kill one wolf and completed the work on 7/23.

On 7/22, WS confirmed 6 dead buck sheep as killed by wolves on private land in the Rock creek area on the East Fork of the Blacktail. Additional dead sheep were investigated and confirmed as wolf depredation by the end of the week. Based on monitoring information and field reports, 3 uncollared

wolves from an unknown pack were in the immediate area of the sheep on repeated occasions. FWP had requested WS to collar and release a wolf to determine whether it was a new pack or the wolves were part of a different / known pack. Subsequent losses occurred on the same private land and totaled about 20-25 bucks. Because of repeated losses, FWP made a new decision and requested removal of the 3 wolves which appear to be unaffiliated with other known packs. Control work is ongoing.

On 7/23, FWP (Lance) coordinated with ID Fish and Game and ID WS regarding confirmed sheep killed near Humphrey ID by a wolf pack that is a “border” pack. This pack resides in ID and is considered an ID pack, though it occasionally travels in Montana. IDFG had authorized full pack removal. FWP authorized ID WS to carry out lethal control efforts in MT should the wolves be found in MT and requested ID WS to coordinate their work with MT WS. ID WS killed one adult wolf about 1 mile across the state border into MT on 7/23. The carcass will be retained by IDFG as a part of their pack management / data collection effort.

### **Outreach and Education**

Bradley gave an evening presentation at Lake Como in the Bitterroot Valley on July 7th as part of the Forest Service's "Walk by the Light of the Moon" series. ~ 60 people attended.

### **Research Activities**

Nothing to report.

### **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

Bradley detected 2 collars on mortality mode during her last flight in the Lower Clark Fork. FWP investigated the second mortality (Mineral Mountain pack) which occurred in a remote area. The collar was retrieved and the mortality is under investigation.

### **Other**

#### *NEW -- Delisting Litigation Formally Starts*

On June 2, a coalition of 13 groups, represented by the law firm EarthJustice, challenged the USFWS delisting decision in Federal District Court in Missoula (9<sup>th</sup> Circuit). The complaint alleges the USFWS delisting decision was an arbitrary and capricious violation of the federal Endangered Species Act for a variety of reasons. A request for a preliminary injunction (which if granted by the Court, would keep federal ESA protections in place during the litigation) has not been filed at this time. The Greater Yellowstone has also filed a lawsuit challenging the federal delisting decision. The groups will be represented by their own attorney's, respectively, but the cases were consolidated. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will seek to intervene in the Missoula Court on behalf of the State of Montana. Montana supports federal efforts to delist wolves.

Additionally, the State of Wyoming filed a lawsuit in the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit (Cheyenne Wyoming) challenging USFWS's rejection of Wyoming's regulatory framework and state plan.

#### *Background for Montana*

On May 4, gray wolves in Montana were delisted. Conservation and management are guided by Montana laws, administrative rules (ARM 12.9.1301 – 12.9.1305), and the state's federally-approved plan. Wolves in Montana were automatically reclassified to a “species in need of management” statewide on May 4. The gray wolf is protected statewide, though individual wolves may be hazed, harassed, or killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock. Incidents must be reported and each will be investigated. Wolves may also be killed to protect human life. See the FWP wolf web page for a Fact Sheet and answers to frequently asked questions about delisting. The FWP wolf web page also has information

about state law and regulations and what livestock owners can do to protect livestock. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

*Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season:*

FWP and the FWP Commission continue to prepare for a potential 2009 season. On July 8, the FWP Commission adopted final quotas. FWP recommended and the Commission approved a statewide quota of 75. The statewide quota is distributed across 3 Wolf Management Units (41 in northwest Montana, 22 in western Montana, and 12 in southwest Montana). In addition, FWP recommended and the Commission approved a subunit subquota of two wolves for the North Fork Flathead drainage on the west side of Glacier National Park which applies towards the total quota for WMU 1 of 41. The season structure previously adopted by the FWP Commission is still in place.

At this time, FWP expects to begin license sales on August 17. Additional details will be available in the future as FWP continues preparation.

*Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:*

Efforts by Senator Tester and others to create a Wolf-Livestock Demonstration Project (HR146 – wolf “reimbursement” bill) continue in Congress. While the bill itself passed both the House and the Senate (which creates the demonstration project), the appropriation process to fund the demonstration project bill continues. HR2996 (the appropriation bill) was passed by the US House on June 26. It passed a key Senate Committee on July 7 and awaits action by the full Senate.

The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

=====

To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.